

Bill Heneghan's crazy, slobbering, inbred Irish Setter. Ruth stepped back into the house and grabbed the fireplace poker and went after the dog. After a sharp but glancing blow the dog dismounted and ran around in circles, hoping that his tormentor would tire and he could complete his act. Ruth chased him, swinging her poker hard, missing the tail-tucked red butt by inches. Sandra, her carnal desires awakened, trotted after them, squealing and snorting. And little Roy, stepping out of the house and wanting to join the fun, grabbed onto Sandra's curly bed-spring of a tail as she passed by and got pulled into the chase at a faster run than he'd ever before attempted.

COME DANCE WITH ME!

They are going to see Sinatra. Ruth and Ellis and their next door neighbors, Clete and Juanita, are humming along Interstate 15 in Ruth and Ellis' Oldsmobile, Las Vegas bound — Old Blue Eyes is singing at Bally's.

They stop at the McDonald's in Victorville at sunset for burgers and cokes. When they climb back into the car — men in front, women in back — Ellis slides a compact disk into his new stereo, Frank Sinatra's 'Come Dance With Me!' A photo of Frank graces the cover of the CD. He wears a blue suit, shirt, tie and fedora. He is grinning like a pervert, one eye winking, a fist angled toward his chin with its index finger extended and crooked slightly in the 'come here' gesture. The first song is a horn blaring rendition of 'Come Dance With Me!' The sound on Ellis' new speakers is sharp and pure. Juanita taps her foot in the back seat and says, "This stuff makes me feel like dancin'."

When Ellis pulls over at the rest stop to take a leak, Clete says over the back of his seat to Juanita, "Hey cutes, let's dance." Clete turns up the stereo's volume to the max and leaves his door hanging open; the smooth rolling 'Dancing in the Dark' is playing, Sinatra crooning for all he's worth. Clete and Juanita skip hand-in-hand up onto the lawn and begin their dance.

That leaves Ruth and Ellis alone in the car, Ellis gripping the steering wheel with both hands, Ruth, arms crossed tight and scowling, as silent as a stone in the back seat. Ellis says, "Man, look at all the damned stars, would ya? Nothin' like the desert for a starry night, huh, Ruth?" He's not sure she has heard him over the stereo, or if she has heard him, he's not sure if she's answered. He checks the rear-view mirror; the look on her face says she will kill him if he says the wrong thing, or fails to say the right one. Clete and Juanita — Clete in his droopy t-

shirt, plaid bermudas and rubber shower shoes, Juanita in her pink jogging suit and matching bedroom slippers — glide gracefully into view in the wide-screen panorama of the windshield, their background the desert's lunar hills and the burning white stars above them. "RUTH!" Ellis shouts. "WOULD YOU LIKE TO DANCE?" He looks into the mirror at her. She nods her head that yes she would. So, for the first time since their wedding reception thirty years ago, Ruth and Ellis dance....

Ellis is inept, stumbling around the rest stop lawn with his stout wife in his arms as The Chairman of the Board belts out 'Too Close for Comfort,' nearly shouting the chorus. Ruth lets Ellis lead for thirty seconds before she decides she has had enough. She lifts her hands from his shoulders and places them on his waist, hooking her thumbs through his belt loops. Then she lifts him until his feet just barely graze the ground, and she steers him about, their dancing a much smoother operation with her in charge.

LAWN MOWER TIMES TWO

It was a small mishap: Ellis was giving his toddler son an airplane ride, spinning around and around, when he got the dizzies and fell, letting go of young Roy, sending him off on a tangent that carried him — in a sparkling explosion — through the window and onto the front lawn, miraculously unhurt by the hundred sharp shards that tumbled into the grass around him.

Ellis quickly — before his wife returned from the mall — retrieved his son and nailed a piece of scrap plywood over the ruined window. The ragged-cut, scarred blond wood stuck to the stucco brought Chuck-From-Down-The Street to the front door to say: "You're making the neighborhood look like shit, Ellis old Boy, with your fuckin' wooden window. Ain't it bad enough we got the niggers movin' in on us?"

Ellis told Chuck to get off his porch. Chuck complied, then he went home and told his wife that Ruth and Ellis Leahy were trash.

When Ruth came home, Ellis told her a kid had batted a baseball through the window. Ruth asked him why, in that case, was all the glass out on the lawn instead of in the living room. Ellis told her he'd scooped it off the rug with the dust pan and thrown it out in the yard so little Roy, paddling around the house in his stocking feet, wouldn't cut himself. Ruth told him to go out there and clean that mess off the lawn.